3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

776 821 [539] Ventres or the enemy. According to another, the sun on one occasion delivered seven Gros Ventre men, to be killed by the Crow, into the hands of a Gros Ventre woman captured by the Crow, so the woman claimed. Apart from the incidental inclusion of the moon, bracketed with the sun, in prayers and in invitations to sweat as above stated, there was no specific independent moon cult and in no case, according to our informants, were sacrifices ever made to the moon. Nor, so far as we could discover, was there any star cult, though the stars, or some of them such as those constituting the Great Dipper, the Pleiades, the Bear were seemingly looked upon as in some sense "spirits" or personal beings. In the archaic era, before the flood and Ni:hahat, people used to go in the morning to get fire from the morning star, "the cross," just as in modern times the old people [392] used to go in the morning to get a live coal from a neighbor's hearth instead of using matches. The morning star served also as a "clock." When people were planning to get up unusually early in the morning they would be guided by its position in the [805] heavens. Someone in the lodge would be told: "Go out and see if the cross is up yet."

776 Among the beings involved in prayers and invited to sweat, after the Supreme Being, were the "Four Old Men," currently referred to by English-speaking Gros Ventres as the "Four Holy Old Men." According to Singer and Coming Daylight there were also, it appears, "Four Old Women," but this statement was not independently confirmed by other informants.

Very little is known about these Four Old Men. The Boy had more than once asked his father about them, but Lame Bull could only say that the Gros Ventres were taught by Ni:hahat to call on them in praying and sweating but that the people did not know who they are. They lived in the very beginning of things, but whether before or after the flood, is not quite clear. They were 776 not human beings. Gros Ventre belief does not associate them with the four winds or cardinal directions, but, vaguely, with the ● 801 sacred number four, the four "ridges" or stages of full human life, and the four great floods or other great catastrophes or revolutions, of which the first was the primeval flood, that are to occur,

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

776
801 ●
[823]

according to one tradition, in the career of humanity. Some thought World War II was one of these four. The Gros Ventres do not recognize any beings connected or identified with the four winds or four cardinal directions.

776
782

Sometimes another being "Broken Knife" was appealed to in prayers. Little too, is known of him, except that he was, some time in the distant past, a renowned Keeper of the Flat Pipe. According to Al Chandler, Broken Knife was the name of the young man who was first given the Feathered Pipe. (For details, No. 6d in Appendix.) He was asked to pray for the supplicants, just as it was customary for the people to ask living pipe keepers or ex-keepers to pray and intercede for them, "much as Catholics ask the saints to intercede for them."

776

Much more is known of He-Who-Starved-To-Death who is associated with the Flat Pipe rite. He was a human being, a Pipe child, second son of a certain keeper of the Flat Pipe in the days when the Gros Ventres dwelt in a land of plenty. It was he who in the course of his adventures encountered and befriended the Last Child, offspring of the water monster, and who on his return home taught the people to pray to the Last Child, and introduced three songs into the Flat Pipe rite. He was also the man who first brought horses to the Gros Ventres. His name was given him by the water monster. (For details see No. 5 in Appendix.) In one Flat Pipe rite he was mentioned in prayers, and in the sweat lodge was invited to sweat.

Well known too is He-who-dreams-of-Bha'a, likewise a human being and a Pipe child, the son of the couple who were first given the Feathered Pipe by Bha'a, and who lived when the Gros Ventres had already gotten horses and had reached their historic habitat, but before the advent of the whites. He got power from Bha'a to be a great warrior, and he gave himself his name. (For details see No. 7 in Appendix.) While closely associated with the Feathered Pipe, he was not, so far as we could discover, prayed to.

In general, lesser beings that had no human body were called tciya:təwu:nitä (sing., lit., "false person": tciyattawu, false [Sifton], initä, human being). This category included such minor

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

Flat Pipe. It was dried before being used for ritual purposes. In the olden days the Flat Pipe keeper and co-keeper had monopolistic control of it in curing. But nowadays a peppermint beverage, good for fits, spasms, and stomach disorder, is used by everybody.

The ritual number of the Flat Pipe is three, whereas that of the Feathered Pipe and the Sacred Lodges is four. Songs are sung three times, ritual gestures are in threes, and so forth. The old people when sitting around smoking socially used often to discuss the reason for this. Some held that Earthmaker sent only three animals down to dive for earth, because, for one reason at least, there were only three animals in the Flat Pipe bundle. Others held he sent four. But regardless of these opposing views on this point in the earthmaking, there was always complete agreement that the Flat Pipe ritual number itself was three, while that in the Feathered Pipe and Sacred Lodge rituals was four.

The musical instrument proper to the Flat Pipe ritual was the rattle (see Plate 1C). The drum, proper to the Feathered Pipe ritual, was not used. In the Flat Pipe ritual, the rattle was shaken clockwise in a sort of circle at breast height, whereas medicine men shook their rattles anti-clockwise and Star Dancers alternately back and forth.[1]

It may be added here that while the Flat Pipe was actually smoked only when it was being ritually trans'erred to a new keeper and when some individual had vowed to smoke it, and was never danced with, smoking the Feathered Pipe and dancing with it were common.

Among the more significant and more commonly recurring features shared by both the Flat Pipe and Feathered Pipe rituals were clockwise movements, singing, and the use of paint, buffalo chips, and of sage, tobacco, larb, and wild parsley.

Entering and leaving the keeper's lodge, ritual gestures, and so forth were consistently clockwise.

Singing bulked large in the Flat Pipe rite, and, for that matter, in nearly every phase of Gros Ventre religious and social life. As Thomas Main put it speaking for himself and The Boy: "We cannot describe how much singing means in the lives of the Gros

[1] For description of Star Dance, see Flannery, 1953, p. 42.

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

*796 had been scattered during the winter, would foregather at a designated place for the spring buffalo hunt, and when the trees were 221 in leaf and the grass up and everything growing and in blossom 361 and a certain kind of sage about 10 inches high, long enough to pluck, the spring rite was held. During the summer months the bands kept more or less together, largely engaged in hunting the buffalo and holding the Sacred Lodges. Around October occurred the larger fall hunt to get in supplies of meat, skin, fur, sinew and so forth for the winter, and, before the bands scattered, the fall rite took place. After the fall rite, the bands scattered for the winter months. The winter rite was performed about the middle of the winter season and was participated in only by the members of the band or bands which had elected to stay the winter with the Pipe and its keeper.

*796 The three rites were fundamentally the same, with some differences to be noted, but had each its own purpose. All three were dominantly theistic in the sense of being directed chiefly toward the Supreme Being. Spring time, when all nature was coming again to life, was in general Gros Ventre religious belief, the most propitious time for prayer. The spring Pipe rite was primarily a rite of hope and petition, a prayer that all things would grow well, that there would be plenty of game and of plant food, that the people would have abundance of all things they needed for living well, that they would be successful in all their worthwhile undertakings such as the hunt, that there would be no sickness, and that all would live happily. The fall rite, held after the winter supply had been killed and dried and berries had been gathered, new lodge coverings made, and perhaps new lodge poles, new bedding, clothes cleaned, etc., was primarily a rite of gladness and thanksgiving. To "make a sort of report" to the Supreme Being that they were still living, that their spring prayers to him had been answered in the way they had asked, and to give thanks to him for these good things which ultimately had come from him. The purpose of
● [801] the winter rite was less clear cut. For one thing, the rite was required to round out the cycle of three, the Pipe number. Thanksgiving was one purpose, thanksgiving "and a sort of singing of praises," "a sort of adoration," because the people were at leisure, without hardship, sickness or anxiety, glad to be still alive in the

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

*796 [276] Sacrifice Dance center pole, the sacred Pipes did not enter at all into the Sacred Lodges.

[801] In all the Sacred Dances, the ritual number was four and movement was clockwise.

A sweat-lodge rite was held in connection with the Sacrifice and Crazy Dances, but we could obtain no details on it; whether also in connection with the others our informants could not say.

The Sacrifice, Drum, Kit-fox, Dog and Crazy Dances regularly lasted four nights and days; the Fly and probably the Old Men's and Old Women's just one day.

The sacred Dances were not held in the winter time when the bands were usually widely scattered, but in the period from about May or June when the bands foregathered to September after which the bands tended to scatter for the fall buffalo hunt.

[361] The lodges for the Old Men's and Old Women's Dances were very simple and were put up outside the camp circle toward the south thereof. The lodges for the other Dances were erected inside the camp circle, near the center.

Feasting daily during the four-day dances was customary, except during the Sacrifice Dance which entailed much fasting on the part of the participants.

The alternation of reverent tension and pleasurable free release that characterized the sacred Pipe rites was even more characteristic of the Sacred Dances.

Sacrifice Dance

*796 The proper name of the Gros Ventre dance commonly referred to by whites and by many English-speaking Gros Ventres as the Sun Dance is aθe:hao'wə (literally, "sacrifice lodge"—aθe:'atc "sacrifice" and -ao'wə "sacred [not common] lodge"; cf. Sifton "sacrifice," athéyach and "Sun Dance," athéihawh'). We are therefore using the term Sacrifice Dance for it. The sun does not enter at all into it. The name apparently has references to the tortures undergone around the center pole by the main participants.

115 Our chief informants on the Sacrifice Dance were The Boy and Thick, who had witnessed the rite as boys and who had learned much about it from their elders: Coming Daylight, who had wit-

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

been told to do and put up the Drum Dance. Thus was the Drum Dance introduced among the Gros Ventres into their sacred dance system."

When Lame Bull told The Boy this story, the latter asked him: "Who was it who gave this dance and these horses?" And his father answered: "The killdeer." So the Drum Dance is owned by the killdeer (*Oxyechus vociferus*).

The Drum Dance ranked high in dignity among the Sacred dances. Lame Bull ranked it next after the Sacrifice Dance, and first in importance in the Drum-Dog-Kitfox-Crazy group, because, he told The Boy, the Drum Dance was "most difficult and complicated to carry out," and through it "more horses had come to the Gros Ventre tribe."

The Drum Dance was held only in fulfillment of a vow. The rite lasted the customary four days and nights, with a big feast each day. The Boy was uncertain whether a sweat-lodge ceremony was held during the Drum Dance.

The chief sacred objects used in the Drum Dance were, so far as we could learn, the very large drum, and the fur-wrapped crooked sticks which were carried by the dancers and which to judge from the origin story were four in number and were decorated as therein described. The dancers themselves were painted yellow all over their bodies, with black dots, representing hail, from the waist up.

Four of the Drum Dance songs, numbers 52-55, were recorded, as sung by The Boy, who had learned them from his father, Lame Bull. There were others which The Boy did not remember, nor did he know the ritual order in which they were sung.

Two of these four songs, numbers 52 and 53, are wordless, and were sung at good-time dances during the Drum Dance. Number 53 is the song that was sung by the men marching out of the dry lake-bed when the Drum Dance was first given to the starving Gros Ventre man by the killdeer. These dancing songs were lively ones, sung to fast time.

Song number 54 is difficult to translate as the meaning of two of one of the words was unknown. The Boy ventured the conjecture that the whole wording might possibly mean: "There are

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

apart from emergency conditions, ritual variations from the above-described pattern occurred, perhaps in accord with varying ritual instructions received by different individuals from their respective ghost helpers. 769 787

Before leaving the ghost helper complex and taking up the power complex, we may mention here one case, given us by Al Chandler, the only one of its kind we recorded, which shares certain elements peculiar to each. Al Chandler's adoptive father, Little Man, was keeping a rib bone of his deceased uncle, who had been "a kind of medicine man." His uncle's spirit came and asked Little Man: "Why do you do this? What are you going to do with me?" "This is just for myself," Little Man replied. "I don't want to be that kind who have spirits. If I need you I am going to call on you and I want you to help me. I am not going to make you a popular servant (not going to use the rib in general practice). But if I need you, you can come and help me." 755 769 787

Little Man, Al told us, made use of that rib one time when he cured his brother-in-law, old Turn Toes, of facial paralysis (caused by ghosts: cf. supra, p. 23). Brothers-in-law like to tease each other. So when Turn Toes came to Little Man to be treated, the latter took the rib, rubbed it four times, and in fun twisted Turn Toes' mouth way around on the other side. At this, Little Man's wife got angry and said: "You shouldn't do that to him." Little Man said: "I just want to make sure that the next time his mouth won't go crooked on this other side." So then Little Man put his brother-in-law's mouth straight and shoved his eyes up in place. And Al added: "You can see that old man [Turn Toes] today [1940] and he is all right." [Turn Toes has since died, in 1942 or 1943]. 801

Whether in the above case curing power was in the rib itself or whether the ghost of Little Man's uncle came and cured on occasions of use of the rib, is not clear. If the latter, as implied in Little Man's words to his uncle, at the beginning, we have a curing differing materially from the one to be described in the following on supernatural power, and much more akin to the Woodland Alqonquian concept of the guardian spirit proper,—the guardian spirit who comes on call to cure and otherwise to help the possessor, 769 787

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

after a certain period of probation. He, however, broke the rule and doctored before his time was up. A night or so after he had doctored a spider came out of his ears and a thunder-rock out of his mouth, and so he lost his doctoring power.

Occasionally in connection with the power quest the right would be given to the quester to paint his lodge in a particular manner.[13] Among the Gros Ventre such sacred or holy painted lodges were relatively rare and were thought of very highly. We recorded one song (No. 88), a wordless one, which belonged with Bull Lodge's sacred lodge. Bull Lodge had been "invited" to quest for power at Baldy Butte, the highest peak in the Bear Paws. The being who gave him other powers also bestowed upon him his own lodge, with instructions how to paint it and the song to sing while it was being painted. Coming Daylight's father had a sacred lodge around the bottom of which were painted the figures of men, each figure the same and each with a feather in the head. The upper part was painted red. "At the tip of the ears of the lodge were things hanging, and feathers in back. The back part had a cross (morning star) and the sun."[14]

What has been said in the preceding pages about the circumstances of Gros Ventre quest may be illustrated by the following account given by Al Chandler of that of Little Man, his adoptive father:

"When Little Man first went out to seek power, the old medicine man (his tutor in the matter) told him: 'I am going with you.' So when they got out in the hills, maybe a whole day's travel to this place where he wanted to go, this old man asked Little Man where he wanted to go to fast and Little Man chose a place not very far away. So they went together. This old man cut his (Little Man's) flesh, took a pinch,—(some did it 3, 6, or 9 pinches), and prayed each time he cut a bit of flesh off. He told Little Man: 'Nobody is going to come after you until your time is up. If I tell you three days, nobody is coming after you until this time is up. In the meantime use your whole heart and don't get

[13] There was a distinction between the sacred painted lodges and the lodges painted with war deeds. Cf. Flannery, 1953, pp. 68, 102.

[14] For illustrations of sacred painted lodges, see Plate 4.

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

515
782

come and listen to me. God, come and get in the sweat-bath with me. Here is what X [naming the young man] gives you as an offering!' Then he would go on to pray for the young fellow and would tell who had given him [the old man] power to make the sweat-bath this particular way: 'You gave me this for some purpose, so you must come and help me now. This young man has gone to a lot of trouble to do this for me and you. So listen to me and help this young man, whatever his wish is.' Then he stuck the offering in the dirt pile, to remain there while they were all inside the lodge sweating.

"After he and the invited old men got inside the lodge, he would appoint one of them to pour the water on the heated rocks. The appointee would ask, 'How much for the start,' and would be told, 'Four times' or maybe 'Seven times,' either four or seven. The appointee would then pour, the required number of times, just enough, say about one third of or a whole cupful, to make a little steam. Then the leading old fellow would say: 'Now it is up to you. Pour any amount you want.'

"Then all those old men prayed inside for the young man, who remained outside and had to look after the rocks and the opening up of the sweat-lodge. Every so often he had to open it up in front and back and so kind of cooled the sweaters off. It was so opened maybe four successive times, and then the sweating was over.

"The young fellow might then be told to come in, and the old fellows would kind of clean him by first blowing on their hands and then rubbing him, and when they were through they would twiddle their fingers as one does to get rid of dirt.

"This young man hired all these people and he would think that these old men prayed hard, and that he would get what he asked for, and that he would not be afraid, and that regardless of odds he would come out on top because of this faith."

The ritual cleansing effected by sweating as well as the sacrificial aspect of the rite is definitely referred to in the foregoing account, but here as in most other cases the sacrificial aspect is the more prominent. The cleansing effect was also hinted at in Sitting High's remark quoted by Al Chandler: "You have to clean yourself through this sweating."

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

784 789 [834] Sex abstinence was generally observed before hunting, and particularly before and all during golden eagle trapping. Eagle trappers "had to have a special religious character, to observe certain food taboos, and a special way of handling [being handed?] a pipe." The leader of a war party, but not other members thereof, also observed sex abstinence.

Do not break leg bones or ribs to extract the marrow or for other purpose, inside the lodge or house; go outside to do it, else you will get sore legs, or your horses may break their legs. Cora Chandler stated in 1940 that she still observed this latter, as her folks had always made her do. If an embryo calf were to be taken out of the belly of a buffalo, the embryo's eyes had to be extracted before it was brought into the lodge to be cooked; if the eyes were taken out inside the lodge, a member of the family would go blind, —"and this has been proven." Likewise it was forbidden to butcher and extract the brains from a buffalo head inside a lodge, and also break off the "soft end" of roast buffalo ribs. "Never use a knife to fuss with ashes or coals because you might cut yourself if you did so."

After blood-letting, the subject abstained from eating anything fried so the cut would not turn blue.

[551] There does not seem to have been any prohibition against mentioning the name of a deceased relative or other person.

777 801 Coming Daylight and Mary Ereaux had never heard of lucky or unlucky numbers. The Boy, however, stated: "According to the old law, the people were forbidden to use seven. For instance, a war party was not to have seven members, but either more or fewer. Cases are known in which young fellows disobeyed this rule and ran into trouble. In one case of this kind six of the party got killed and only one escaped with his life."